

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 045 310

RE 003 152

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TITLE Motivated: They Will Read.
PUB DATE Jun 70
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the Language Arts and Reading Conference, Ball State University, June 22-23, 1970

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.25 HC-\$0.35
DESCRIPTORS *Disadvantaged Youth, Inner City, Inservice Teacher Education, *Motivation, *Reading Improvement, Reading Instruction, *Secondary Grades, *Urban Schools

ABSTRACT

This discussion presents ways in which disadvantaged secondary students in an inner-city school may be motivated to read. Some ways are (1) giving training in the teachings of reading to secondary teachers, (2) making the disadvantaged students aware that reading is a lifetime learning process and that all hope is not lost if basic reading skills lag somewhat, (3) making the students feel that they can learn to read, (4) developing a respectful and friendly atmosphere in the classroom, and (5) keeping lessons on an adult and life-centered level. Suggested topics for life-centered reading lessons are listed, and a school-wide reading project in Gary, Indiana, which included an inservice workshop, is described.
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"MOTIVATED: THEY WILL READ"

Jennye B. Alsobrooks

Teaching reading to the disadvantaged in secondary schools is one of the most vital issues in education today. Helping the remedial high school student attain some proficiency in reading is a very difficult task and a great challenge to educators.

It is the purpose of this discussion to point out some ways the disadvantaged secondary students, in an inter-city school, may be motivated to read. It is a firm belief that if students are stimulated by teachers they can be motivated to read. If so stimulated they will see the need to read.

The first step toward helping deprived students become better readers and have a better concept of themselves is to clarify to teachers, parents and students the nature of the reading progress.

Reading is a learning process which begins in early childhood and continues to develop through out life. You never stop learning the reading process. Reading is a tool of life which is continuously being sharpened. Too many of us believe the mastery of reading should be accomplished in six years of elementary school. This is a mis-established concept. Yes, the basic reading skills are taught in elementary school--but who is to say we all are mature enough to master them at the elementary school level. Unfortunately those who do not grasp the skills at this level are referred to as dumb, remedial, can't learn etc. It should be established that if you don't retain or grasp reading skills at this level, you may be a little behind in reading comprehension or thinking processes but through maturity, continuous practice and concerned stimulating teaching, reading skills can

be developed.

It is taken for granted after the sixth grade a student should know how to read. If he is a remedial reader he is considered a failure by his teachers, parents and most of all himself.

Secondary teachers believe the teaching of reading is the elementary teacher's job. Students get no directed reading lessons after sixth grade. Students who have not mastered basic skills are not given any individualized help. Students who have mastered the basic reading skills and are good sixth grade readers are not mature enough to use what they know to continue to develop their reading skills.

Secondary teachers take no responsibility for teaching reading. Mainly, because they are not aware of the simple reading-readiness procedures all students must encounter before reading new materials. Most of them say, "I'm not a reading teacher. I'm a Social Studies teacher"--Home Economics--Mathematics etc. But every teacher is a teacher of reading regardless of what he teaches. Teachers of the content areas must be made aware of the role they play in this learning to read process. Every teacher must so stimulate students in a readiness to read procedure that they will be motivated to read material regardless of the content.

To help teachers stimulate reading, a half day in-service workshop, "a Reading-Share-In; was conducted at one of the Gary, Indiana inter-city schools. Reading consultants, reading specialist and reading teachers demonstrated to the content area teachers the techniques of teaching reading. In general the teachers were shown how to utilize the SQ3R plan for study. Some specifics were given content area teachers in group sections. As a result of this in-service training a school-wide reading project was launched to stimulate students so they would be motivated to read.

After the project was on its way the reading teacher pulled from the English classes approximately thirty-five 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade remedial students who revealed from informal oral inventory the need for individualized and small group help.

These disadvantaged students, mostly males had certain common characteristics. Their non-verbal I.Q. were in the normal range and usually higher than the verbal I.Q. Their reading abilities ranged from first grade through fourth grade. Their verbal communication was restricted and their language habits were different from those used by others in the school. They revealed weakness in school know how, habits of looking, listening, paying attention, thinking power and comprehension development. All of these weakness are both a cause and a result of a history of failure and a fear of failure. Their reading skills were so low, they had given up. Of central significance, they lacked the positive self-concept that is vital to learning. This lack of self esteem which is fostered in many disadvantaged homes is too often reinforced by school experiences.

Underneath their apparent apathy and surface indifference to school success many of these youngsters feel both a need and a desire to learn to read. An obese young man who should have graduated 1969 said to his English teacher "Can you teach me to read? If I could read I could make it." When a social worker told 19 year old Calvin that she would help him get a job he answered, "Nobody, including you can get me a job. Don't you know I can't read?" Josh Lazaro, was failing in history because he couldn't read it. He came to the reading teacher and wanted her to read his lessons to him.

To encourage and build self-confidence the reading teacher began at her very first class explaining to these students the reading process and saying although you are behind in your reading ability, learning to read is a life

time thing. No one never masters reading. You only get on a higher reading level through practicing reading and pushing yourself to read. An attempt to create the feeling of "We are going to learn something worthwhile in this class" or "Let's see if we can't get your reading and comprehension power on a higher level," was tried.

To stimulate these disadvantaged students, teachers had to gain the students respect. Here are a few tips:

1. Treat each student as if he is somebody. Respect each as you want to be respected. Greet them as they come into the class with "Good-morning Charles." Show real concern as to why one was absent yesterday. Be sure to address each as "Young man" or "Young lady." Never boy, girl or you children. Show good manners and refinement by saying "please" and "thank you."
2. Let students know by your actions and attitude that they can make mistakes without embarrassment. Don't allow any student to laugh at another's mistake. Relieve a student's anxiety about sounding stupid, by telling him it is all right not to know all the answers.
3. Let a student know that he is competing with no one but himself. Never compare him with another student. Let him work at his own level and advance when he is ready to do so.
4. Maintain high morale and constructive classroom atmosphere by pleasantness and cooperation.
5. Be prepared to answer patiently the most simple questions. A friendly relaxed attitude will help students feel comfortable and unthreatened.
6. Accept cheerfully criticisms. Let student know you are not perfect. That you too are learning everyday. Most non-readers or poor readers have a fair degree of oral language maturity. They can understand and speak intelligently about many hundreds of things about which they cannot read or write.
7. Don't take student's knowledge of any reading skill for granted. Don't assume that a student knows his vowel sounds or double blend etc. Each student must demonstrate proficiency in every language skill. Avoid skill gaps. These students like attention. They want you to hear them read orally.

8. Make every lesson an experience of success and mastery for the student. Feelings of failure must be avoided. Constant praise is the secret. Express confidence in your students.
9. Keep all lessons adult and life centered.
10. A sense of success can be realized from small accomplishments under the leadership of a wise instructor.

In addition to the regular curriculum materials the following adult and life centered materials create stimulating reading lessons and units:

1. Job application blanks
2. Income tax forms
3. Vocational brochures
4. Loan application blanks
5. Signs: traffic, billboards
6. Driver training literature and tests
7. Prescription labels
8. Recipe books
9. Maps, travel guides
10. Telephone Directory
11. Menus from restaurants
12. Weekly newspapers and magazines written on easy reading levels for adults
13. Word bank using words in industry, home, sport vocations and school
14. Word games: Scramble, Abaca and others
15. Comic books

In summary, (1) secondary teachers need some in-service training in teaching reading; (2) disadvantaged students need to be made aware that reading is a life time learning process and all hope is not lost if basic reading skills lag somewhat; (3) disadvantaged students should be made to feel that they can learn to read; (4) develop a respectful and friendly atmosphere in the classroom; and (5) keep lessons on an adult and life centered level.